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Providence, R. I.
Mechanics & Manufacturers
Assoc.

1910

Mr. Howland's

Address.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Providence Association of

MECHANICS AND MANUFACTURERS,

APRIL 9, 1810:

BEING

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHOICE OF OFFICERS

IN THE

Association.

.....

BY JOHN HOWLAND, ESQ.
SECRETARY OF THE ASSOCIATION.

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PROVIDENCE:

From the Press of Jones & Wheeler.
1810.

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PROVIDENCE, April 9th, 1910.

SIR,

THE Committee of Arrangements, pursuant to a vote of the Association unanimously passed this day, present to you the thanks of the Association for your very ingenious and appropriate Address this day delivered before them, and request a copy of the same for the press.

We are, very respectfully, your friends and associates,

SAMUEL PEARSON,	} Committee.
AMIEL ALLEN,	
JOSIAH LAWTON,	
JAMES BURN,	
JOHN C. JENCKES,	

TO JOHN HOWLAND, Esq.

*To the Committee of Arrangements of the
Providence Association of Mechanics
and Manufacturers.*

GENTLEMEN,

IN the same spirit of confidence and attachment to my fellow-associates, which induced my compliance with their request to deliver the Address, it is now submitted, at their further request, for publication.

Accept, Gentlemen, my assurances of high respect and regard.

JOHN HOWLAND.

*Source unknown
Nov 15, 1940*

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ADDRESS.

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MR. PRESIDENT,

and

Brethren of the Association,

CALLED to address you on this pleasing Anniversary, and having in so many instances experienced your candor and indulgence, I did not feel myself at liberty to decline the arduous office; and if any thing I may offer should, either in matter or composition, be deemed unworthy the great occasion, the liberality of brother craftsmen, and a just deference to the gentlemen of the committee whom you appointed to designate a member for this purpose, will induce you at least lightly to censure them.

The subjects which present to view as connected with the objects of our institution, are so various, and yet so obviously important, that they seem almost equally to press upon our attention, and render it difficult to decide, which of them to make the subject of the present

address. I shall, therefore, to relieve myself from this perplexity, as they pass in review before us, give each of them such a share of attention, as your time and patience may permit.

The mechanics and manufacturers, being brethren of the same family, associated under our charter for purposes the most laudable; and these having been steadily kept in view, the experience of more than twenty years has attested, that the fears and jealousies of many of our fellow-citizens, of secret purposes and undefined principles, tending to public disquiet or private injury, have not been realized. The return of this anniversary, under circumstances so auspicious, from the increase of our numbers, the state of our funds, and the harmony subsisting among our associates, is a subject of mutual congratulation, and presages the increasing usefulness of an institution, which, discarding political contentions, combines with its principles practical benevolence and social order.

In the infancy of society, before men were multiplied upon the earth, the patriarchs, seated in a mild and genial climate, subsisted on the spontaneous productions of nature. Arts were not known, because they were not then necessary: had the state of society required their aid, doubtless that wisdom, and strength, and beau-

ty, derived from the first pair, would have commanded them into existence, and defined their use. At length, when men increased on the earth, or emigrated to regions less hospitable and benign...to regions where labor became necessary to force the ground to yield the means of subsistence to its possessors...THEN ROSE THE MECHANIC ARTS ; and their *use* or *improvement* marked the grades of civilization. A people destitute of the mechanic arts were compelled to seek a scanty subsistence by hunting, and gradually lost those divine impressions of wisdom and virtue originally stamped on the fathers of our race. In this view, those highly favored men to whom the world is indebted for the useful arts, have ever been considered its greatest benefactors. In former ages, when the true ground of distinction was better understood, the professors of the useful arts were ranked as the wise men and the noble ; for before the ground could be sowed or the harvest reaped, it was necessary the mechanic should make the plough and the sickle.

To trace the records of ancient times, and from them to note the great benefactors of mankind, the inventors of the useful arts in different periods and in distant nations, has been the laborious but pleasing task of gentlemen of high

attainments in learning and eloquence, who at several of our annual celebrations have favored this society, and done honor to the subject, by leaving this path fully explored. We shall not therefore dwell on this part of the subject.

But in this place it may be most proper to notice an error, or rather a mistake so palpable, that were it not almost universal, and sanctioned by names in high repute, it might seem like *moments wasted* to stay to refute it. The mistake is this: that Agriculture constitutes the first rank of useful employments...that all other arts and employments are subordinate thereto...that we are exclusively indebted to agriculture for subsistence...that the good old-fashioned phrase, *WE THE PEOPLE*, which constitutes the basement story from which rises the noble structure of our national government, that this means nothing more or less than *we the farmers*...that arts, manufactures and commerce, are entitled to neither encouragement or protection, except as the handmaids of agriculture.— All this is political heresy and false doctrine.— The savages of the western wilderness could teach us better than this; with them the man who makes the bow and arrows is the most honorable man of the tribe, and he is commonly the sachem; they know that the hunter could not

kill the deer except he supplied the means.—
 Let an invading enemy determine most effectually to *humble* and *weaken* a country he should enter, let him carry off the smiths only, and what would become of its agriculture? This experiment was once tried in an eastern nation, and the sacred historian informs us, that with forty thousand men that followed Saul there was not found either *sword* or *spear*; and that the cultivators of the soil were obliged to leave their country, and repair to the land of their enemies, to sharpen each man his *share*, his *coulter*, his *axe*, and his *mattock*. Do we mean by this to say, that the mechanic ranks above the farmer? We certainly do not: we contend for no such superiority, for in this we declare there is no first or second place. In shewing the importance of the mechanic arts, not only to agriculture but to philosophy, science and literature, we may advert for a moment to the state of the natives of this country at the time our fathers arrived from England, or even to the state of the western tribes at the present day, who have exchanged the bear-skin for the blanket, and learn the value of the mechanic arts from those who are destitute of them. Our ancestors found them with a piece of raw hide cut out with a sharp stone, and laced about the feet; and this was obliged to suffice them instead of all the art of the tanner, the

currier, and the cordwainer, instead of the convenient and comfortable habitations in which we dwell ; theirs were the sordid and smoky hut, in which without salt and without bread they broiled the gory venison.

If the mechanic arts struck into existence the first spark which illumined the dark and dreary night of the savage state, they are no less useful in aiding the progress of civilization. Philosophy and literature are indebted to the mechanic arts for their high improvements and present state of perfection. In accompanying philosophy in her sublime researches they, like the wedded pair, are bound to promote each other's welfare till death shall separate them ; *then*, indeed, there is this difference, that the death of one is the death of the other.

Strike the type-founder, the printer and the manufacturers of paper and parchment, out of the system, and what would become of the republic of letters ? It is true writings might for a time be preserved in Hindostan, where they engrave letters on the leaves of the palm tree ; but these are of a perishable nature, and the tree which bears these precious leaves does not flourish in every climate. Could Newton, a name which none can pronounce without the deepest veneration, could he have poured such a flood of

light into the regions of science, without the help of the mechanic arts?...could Franklin have extracted the electric fluid from the clouds, if the paper-maker and the manufacturer of cordage had not furnished the materials for his kite?...could Rittenhouse, with all his skill in astronomy, have constructed the orrery which has placed him among the sons of fame, if he had not served an apprenticeship to a cabinet-maker?...could Bulfinch, with all his theory of architecture, have placed the superb State-house on Beacon-hill, if the mason and the carpenter had not been there?...withdraw the axe, the hammer and the saw from the ship-yard, and where would you look for the commerce of the world? Let not this be represented as a partial view of the subject. With pleasure, and I may add with gratitude, we acknowledge the mutual obligations we are under. Allied to every thing that is of high estimation, we will support that rank which so evidently belongs to us; but let us at the same time consider, that the improved state of the mechanic arts and of manufactures is derived from improvements in experimental philosophy, and from scientific men—from the increased and still increasing light drawn from the schools, from academies and from universities—from *commerce*, which brings to every coun-

try blessed with a free trade, the inventions, the arts, and the improvements of every other. The mechanic and the manufacturer have ever felt the sympathies of relationship...in many things they are identified, in all things connected. What branch of manufactures can be established without the aid of the mechanic? and there is none which can proceed a step in its course without his support—like the various ducts of the animal system in which the fluids of life are conveyed, and without which they would be but a congealed mass, the mechanic arts are the channels through which life and activity are conveyed to the most productive manufacture. What though there may be some who from inattention do not acknowledge this, their inattention to this unavoidable connection no more operates upon the fact, than did the ignorance of the world respecting that vital principle, the circulation of the blood, before it was discovered and published by Harvey.

Civil society, the cement of which is the moral virtues, must, like a superb and stately edifice, be built up and constructed with various parts and of divers materials, 'fitly joined together.' The mechanic and manufacturer, the farmer, the merchant, the professors of the liberal and of the fine arts, all these essentially contribute to form that improved state of society, which

alone can render our condition comfortable and pleasing, and from which all our rational enjoyments proceed. It is highly gratifying, and worthy the benevolent mind, to view the connecting links of this golden chain, which binds the various interests to the public good; like the parts of the human body, none can say to the other, I have no need of thee. Not only the different trades, but all the different branches of the various professions, and all the various subdivisions of the arts, are necessary to produce that state of society designed by our benevolent creator as the result of all our labors, that which shall induce us to render homage to his name, or stand self-condemned for the deepest ingratitude.

It was a wise and benevolent design of the Deity which, in providing for our mutual wants, thus taught us our mutual dependence. From this state of dependence none of our race are exempt. If there should have been a solitary individual, wrapped in the mantle of self-importance, so weak as to say he was under no obligation to a fellow-man, the experience of the next moment would teach him his delusion.

To review the rise and progress of manufactures generally in this country, and contemplate the various causes which have at different periods accelerated or retarded that progress, would furnish both amusement and useful instruction; but

our plan will not admit of more than even a cursory view of the history of what are called household manufactures.

The first emigrants from our parent country, knowing they were to land in an uncultivated wilderness, and that many years must pass away before their sheep or their flax would afford them sufficient clothing, came provided with as large a supply as their circumstances would permit. Their first object was to raise provisions to carry them through the severe winters of this climate, and for several years they found this a difficult task. The size of the ships of those days, and their being crowded with passengers, left little room for cattle, and when they had obtained them it was several years before they had oxen in sufficient numbers for the plough. Next to a supply of bread, their attention was turned to the subject of clothing. Their importations from Europe could only be commensurate to their remittances, and these were limited chiefly to skins which they purchased of the Indians.— They were compelled therefore to attend to the raising wool and flax, and to household manufactures, and many years witnessed their privations before they obtained an adequate supply from this resource; for, after producing the raw materials of which the fabrics were to consist, they had to construct the wheel and the loom,

and then to learn the practical use of them ; a business perhaps to which few of them had been accustomed in their native country ; but every passing year brought them nearer their desired object—and, in the ever memorable year 1639, the first piece of cloth ever wove in what is now the United States of America, was manufactured in the town of Rowley, Essex county, Massachusetts. This was nineteen years after the first landing at Plymouth, and three years after the arrival of Roger Williams and his associates at this place. The attention of government being drawn to this object, its high importance seemed to engross much of their deliberations, and various expedients were devised to induce every family to bring forth all their ingenuity and industry, and to this every individual was prompted by their common feelings and mutual wants. Cotton was imported from the West-Indies, but the yearly increase of their flax and their wool, in consequence of a disposition to consider this as a test of patriotism, as well as a matter of the first necessity, gradually rendered the importation of cotton an object of less importance ; and we may judge of their care to increase the staple article of wool by this circumstance, that when the Indians burned the town of Warwick in this State, they destroyed or drove off from one farm only, 200 sheep.

Household manufactures, began at first from necessity, were continued from habit, and for more than a century a vast majority of the families of New-England were clothed in the productions of their own wheels and looms. Their importations from Europe were chiefly limited to books, stationary, hardware, and the tools of mechanics.

At length, as the settlements in the southern colonies on the continent, and in the West-India islands, progressed, trade increased, and the profits of their circuitous commerce rested in England, in payment of the continually increasing amount drawn from that country.

But the most rapid increase of supplies drawn from Europe, and consequent decline of domestic manufactures, arose about fifty years ago from a new source of wealth, the whale fishery. This furnished the means of remittance to a large amount, and established the credit of the importer, which enabled him to supply the country with clothing better finished, though not of equal texture, with that furnished by our own looms.— Household manufactures then gradually melted away in the increasing rage for more showy but less substantial fabrics.

But let us not, as the friends of domestic manufactures, rashly denounce this increase of trade because it thus operated unfavorably on house-

hold labor. It was in the designs of unerring wisdom, that this people should be built up to a great and an independent nation ; and no one system of policy devised by human wisdom was equal to this purpose. Trade and commerce was to be a great auxiliary. We can now perceive, that if commerce had not flourished, and if our importations of European manufactures had been restrained for several years preceding the American revolution, that revolution could not have happened. Our arms and military stores, including the duck which in the form of tents sheltered the American army from the pelt-ing storms, were the effects of this trade and of these importations ; and the ability to feed and clothe that army, was derived in a great degree from the capitals acquired by commerce.

Peace on again revisiting our shores found us without commerce and without capital. Vast forests remained even in the eastern States ; the ground they covered invited the hand of the cultivator, and the right of soil could be obtained for a trifle ; instead, therefore, of returning to domestic manufactures, a spirit of emigration seized the inhabitants of the old settlements, and our borders were extended to the northern lakes.— Even the national line of demarcation did not restrain them, and Canada received an accession of thousands to *her* numbers.

Another source of depression to the manufactures of our country, was the conflicting interests and retaliatory measures produced by State jealousy. Every State was an independent sovereignty, and each State was considered by the adjoining States as a foreign country. A man travelling to market, on arriving at the State boundary, was compelled to make report to an officer, prove the origin of his manufactures, and pay fees before he could be permitted to pass on the public highway. The mechanics and manufacturers, therefore, possessing that patriotism and those enlightened views which have ever distinguished this portion of society, were zealous for the establishment of the federal constitution, and thereby transferring the attributes of sovereignty from the individual States to a national government; and by their active co-operation with others of their fellow-citizens, a small majority was obtained for concentrating the power and the strength of the continent under the national compact.

The manufacturers and artists soon felt the advantage of the new system, and their experience of the utility of protecting duties, established in lieu of vexatious and restrictive regulations, has operated to identify their interests and views with this wise measure of national policy.

But the time had not yet fully arrived to develop the latent powers and productive operations of the genius of this people. The war which has so long afflicted Europe, and spread misery and desolation over some of its finest provinces, has enriched this country by an extensive and productive commerce ; but this harvest, reaped on the fields of remote nations, is now gathered in, and it is probable there will be but a pittance left for the hands of the gleaner.— The great capitalists, presaging this, are, therefore, vesting their property in extensive and productive factories of cotton ; and the yarn wrought in such quantities by the various operations of machinery, now finds its way into every family ; and we hear the glad sound of the loom and the shuttle as we pass the streets of the most opulent towns, or travel the road through the scattered villages. Thus we see, that although foreign trade, when its powers were feeble, supplanted household manufactures, yet that same foreign trade, when in its might and in its strength, has brought to our shores not only the complicated machinery, but the capital stock, to set all these wheels in motion ; and instead of one loom which it rendered useless, it has produced an hundred on an improved plan, and which are worked with more productive skill.

But the genius and enterprize of the northern and middle States will not be restrained to manufactures of cotton ; the time has arrived for manufactures in woollen to claim their share of public attention. The fever of emigration to the northern frontier has abated, and the state of population in the agricultural districts will soon admit of thousands to be employed in this profitable and already progressing manufacture.— The numerous flocks of sheep, which once covered the islands and shores of this State, were either carried off by the hostile fleets which infested the coast in the late war, or were served out as rations to our own militia, who were placed to prevent these depredations, and the farmers, till within a short time, neglected to renew them ; but the scene is now changing, and not only the number but the kind of sheep, as it respects the quality of the wool, is considered with increased attention.

Next to Columbus, who gave them a new world, Cardinal Ximenes is remembered in Spain as their greatest benefactor, for introducing into that kingdom the sheep from Barbary : and in England, in atonement for the long and bloody wars between the houses of York and Lancaster, they can mention no circumstance of more importance, than that of Edward the fourth obtain-

ing an act of parliament for importing the Spanish sheep, as from this mixture of the Spanish and English wool, the woollen manufactures of England have derived their high reputation, and the nation so much of its riches. Lewis the fourteenth patronized the woollen manufactories of France, and granted great privileges to the company of woollen drapers in Paris ; and before their revolution, the cloth of the royal manufactory of Sedan brought the highest price in every city in Europe.

How estimable is that patriotism which clothes and warms a whole people ! This kind of patriotism soars as high above that of the political demagogue, as the eagle that takes her flight from the mountain top rises above the croaking reptile of the valley. *Livingston*, *HUMPHREYS*, and *Jacobs*, by introducing the Spanish and Grecian sheep, have conferred greater benefits on this country, than ever could have been derived to it from all their military achievements or diplomatic skill, employed in the most successful political negociations. It is now sixty years since an Elector of Saxony introduced the Merino sheep into the north of Germany, and the wool still retains all its original excellence. From this circumstance we have the strongest assurance, that the quality will not degenerate in our climate ; and that the cloth of New-England will soon

equal that of Segovia herself in the days of her prosperity.

The objection to establishing manufactures... that they will take off too many hands from agriculture, derived its greatest weight and influence in France, from its having been made by the great Duke of Sully ; and in our country it has been urged with greater success, from the state of our population compared with the extent of our territory ; but the experience of this country has already evinced, that agriculture is in its greatest state of improvement, in those districts where manufactures are the most flourishing.... and, as has been already observed, the whole system of public economy insuring the greatest degree of private happiness in the social state, must be built up by the combined influence of agriculture, commerce, manufactures and the mechanic arts, under the cheering light of science and literature ; and universal experience has proved that this combined influence can only operate with effect in a free country.

IN addressing this Association on the day of their annual meeting, the idea of the revolutions of time, and the changes produced in his swift career, necessarily fills and solemnizes the mind. Where are our early associates—the founders of this institution ? Twenty-one years

has broke the social connexion here, and conveyed many of them to the house appointed for all living ; more than sixty are marked on our catalogue as deceased. What an admonition is this ! While here they performed a good work ; they joined with us in bringing forward this society, and in establishing its reputation ; they subscribed to its funds ; many of them then in affluence, moved by the purest benevolence, contributed to the relief of others ; shall we not then look to their now destitute families, and extend an assisting hand ? Yes : you will make provision for their relief—and you must let advice and counsel, and friendly attention accompany pecuniary assistance.

But there is a subject which this Association will ever have a right to contemplate with pleasure, and which may with peculiar propriety be noticed on our anniversary festival, as it cannot fail to heighten the joys excited by social affections and mutual gratulation. The public schools in this town, in which more than 1000 children are daily taught, owe their existence to your memorial presented to the General Assembly of the State. The schools were brought into existence under the auspices of a public law ; but they stood on a surer foundation than the caprice of a six months legislature ; they stood on the solid base of equal right, and on the en-

lightened and liberal views of the citizens of Providence. We are confident more than 3000 children have been taught in these schools, many of whom are now settled in life ; and from the advantages derived from this public instruction are in prosperous circumstances. Their reputation and future respectability we hope will reflect high honor on your persevering exertions.

The singular unanimity of the citizens of Providence in bringing forward and supporting the schools in such high reputation, and cheerfully contributing to their support by adding the sum of 3500 dollars to the annual estimates for the current expences of the year, deserves the highest eulogium ; and this praise is the more justly due from the consideration, that this is the only town in the State where a just sense of duty residing in the breasts of individuals, is brought forth to operate in the body politic, in a matter of the first concern to the freedom and happiness of the community.

While we recognize our social connections, it is with pleasure that we can this day contemplate the fulfilment of that clause in the charter, which declares that this Association shall have perpetual succession. This pledge does not stand singly in the contract between the State and the first associates, but in the presence of so many of the sons of members, who are emulous to per-

petuate this institution...an institution to which every mechanic or manufacturer possessing a good name, and determined to preserve a fair reputation, may find admittance...an institution to which the sons of members are admitted as to their father's house, with higher privileges, and with peculiar regard...an institution which, with the increase of its years, and in its descent to future time, will ascertain and pursue the most practicable means of insuring public and private benefit. In its descent through the lapse of years, it will sweeten, as it passes, the last moments of decaying age, and brighten and cheer the prospect of feeble infancy. Thus shall the streams which issue from the fountain of benevolence be conducted through the medium of this institution, to refresh and enliven the abodes of sorrow; and gratitude and joy shall succeed to the widow's sigh, and to the orphan's tears!

"Ye Sons of Mechanics! O cherish the flame,
 "And wide as the world diffuse Charity's name;
 "Thus to your country new honors you'll raise,
 "And millions unborn will give incense of praise.
 "Relief, O how grateful! how valued the prize,
 "To wipe off the tear from the widow's sad eyes;
 "Console her misfortunes, bid sorrows to cease,
 "And pour in the balm, consolation and peace.
 "FOR THIS WE UNITED....our hearts still approve...
 "Relief is our charter, cemented by love!"

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JUNE 79

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